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Answers To Questions About Re-Siding

by James R. Ziglinski, C.R.



I had a reader call me the other day, sounding very confused. She had attended the past few Home Improvement Shows looking for answers regarding re-siding her home. She said that all she came away with each time was either more questions or total frustration. She told me that most of the contractors pushed one type of siding product over all others and of course, their product was the best. It didn't matter if it was wood, steel, aluminum, vinyl, or simulated stone. What got her frustrated the most, however, was the many times that she was treated like the "little lady" rather than the independent business person she actually is.

Her conversation with me prompted me to look at the questions which I usually get asked when I go on siding calls. Since our firm is independent, not married to any particular manufacturer or product, we do handle all types of siding and exterior wall coverings, with many different brands of each product to choose from. Most often we are asked about the base product itself. For example, let us look at aluminum, steel, and vinyl, since these are mainly considered the "big three" for today's residing projects.

Question 1: Expansion Issues.

In comparison, steel expands/contracts the least. Then comes aluminum, giving vinyl first place. This is reflected in the manner in which these products are installed. Both steel and aluminum can be secured to your exterior walls, allowing for very minor lateral movement. Vinyl, on the other hand, should be hung free to move or float. In other words, the fasteners should only be drawn up to the product and placed in the center of the securing slot. A properly installed vinyl job should allow you to walk up to any panel on a wall and be able to slide it some, from side to side. This is to allow for the tremendous expansion needed for vinyl materials.

Question 2: Sealing or Caulking.

This is brought on by the preceding paragraph. Most siding makers have caulking or sealants that match the siding colors. However, you should only seal certain siding products; wood, steel, and aluminum. Again, this is because vinyl needs lots of room to move. If caulked, natural movement would soon break the seal and the job would look awful. Most times today, caulking and sealing is not done at all, especially if building wrap or wall flatteners are used behind the siding. The normal feeling today is that wind pressure air leaks will be stopped by this underlay.

The positive laps of corner post flanges and other formed trim, with their wide lap areas make it

convenient for eliminating what I consider to be a very important step. Besides that, a home that may not be sealed or has siding that should not be sealed could become a condominium for bees, insects, and other animals that may set up housekeeping behind the panels.

Question 3: Corners.

This question is brought on once more by the previous paragraph. There are basically two types of corners offered by most manufacturers. These are either independent corner pieces or block style corner posts. I'm sure that everyone has gone by homes where independent siding corners are loose or missing. Besides, people feel that these are not too safe where little children play, because of the pointed butts on the corners. Corner posts are most times pre-formed. They are usually hollow and most often open at the top and the bottom. But, consider again nature's creatures. I've been on many siding repair jobs where these types of corner posts were humming with bees or wasps. The wash-through theory also didn't hold water, in my humble opinion.

Quick frost in the evening can block the free flow of water, similar to a gutter ice dam. Since ice expands, these corners may deform or even pop and split. Besides, the moisture behind them takes a long time to dry out, if ever, even with the weep holes provided by the siding. Trapped moisture, in or outside the home, can serve no good purpose. It promotes mold, mildew, and rot; and can attract ants, termites, silverfish, etc.

Although these are the two main types of corner posts offered, my firm offers a third option. We normally install solid, metal clad corner posts. These are wood corner posts, clad with the appropriate trim. Some vinyl manufacturers recognized the problem, too. They developed what looks similar to a large fluted corner post cover. This is placed over solid corner blocks.

Question 4: Insulation.

Most sidings are originally hollow siding panels. Hollow panels can have dropped in insulating panels, usually bead styrofoam or celotex and have some sprayed-on bead or foam insulation. There are also insulating wall flatteners and of course, foam board. Many times the insulation you choose will depend on how loose your home is and how much you wish to invest in the project. It may also help to consider what you do not do at this point may cost you much more, month after month with heating bills that could have been lowered.

Question 5: Ventilation.

Regardless of which siding you select or how you wish to have it installed, understand that it will have an effect on the trapped moisture inside your home. You are making your home tighter, caulking included or not. Vinyl siding is notorious for being a vapor barrier, even with its looseness of installation. It must be vented properly. Ask your contractor to explain how his installation will affect the in-wall dew point and discuss how your home should be properly vented, to accommodate this very important alteration and many times a sizable investment. The venting is the insurance that this new investment won't simply go down the drain or the endless money pit.

Some Final Thoughts

Lastly, think about why you want to consider new siding. If it is because your home can't seem to keep

paint on its walls, your first step should be to discover why it won't stay on. If the paint is peeling or blistering to a base coat or bare wood, you most likely already have a moisture problem. Covering it with new siding will only compound the problem by trapping the moisture behind another barrier.

If you are siding because you want a maintenance free exterior, make sure your installer explains the other items necessary to effect a "maintenance free" project. These could include gutters, soffit, fascia, window/door trim, combination windows/doors, etc. Though siding is many times associated with shysters and the old blue suede shoes sales people, the industry, through professional sales associations such as the Milwaukee/NARI Home Improvement Council, with its certification program, is doing a great job to clean up this bad reputation. So make sure that you get the right answers from the right people. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Professionals in the home improvement industry hate that bad rep just as much as consumers and probably even more so, because it affects their own ethics and manner of making a living. That old reputation serves nobody any good and can only get in the way of a good working relationship. Residing, like any other project, can be fun and exciting, once the smoke is cleared away.

We hope this information has been helpful to you! If you have any further questions, please visit our website at www.aroundyourhouse.net, or contact Jim at Around Your House.

Phone (414) 546-0814

Fax (414) 546-3240

Email: jim@aroundyourhouse.net

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